

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Revelation		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	31		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Revelation 7:15-17; John 10:1-30; Psalm 23		
Date:	May 23, 2021 (a.m.)		

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Christians are never promised an easy life. Rather, we are told over and over again that “through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). We must wage a holy war against Satan and sin “in this dark world” (Ephesians 6:12). Christ declared, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). The letters to the seven churches demonstrate that struggle is the order of the day. There is no end to it. But Christians are also told this – they have been grasped by the Lord Jesus Christ (comp. Philippians 3:12). He has taken the initiative. Christians were given to Him by the Father (John 17:2), and none of them shall ever be lost (John 17:12). Furthermore, He will make sure that they arrive safe and sound. He will oversee their course every step of the way. This is set forth in the Scripture under the imagery of the Shepherd and His sheep. John 10 and Psalm 23 describe this in detail. Regarding the great discourse of John 10 and the Good Shepherd, H. R. Mackintosh has rightly observed: “We must have the 23rd Psalm running half-consciously in our mind as the best commentary on this portion of the text.”¹ In Revelation 7 we find an intriguing picture of Christ as both Lamb and Shepherd, who leads his flock in eternal bliss and wipes away all traces of earthly sorrow. Before examining this in detail, note first the centrality of the Lamb in heaven. Harris helpfully points out: “The first thing to observe is that while there is only one divine throne, there are two occupants – the Lord God and the Lamb (Rev. 3:21; 22:1, 3) – who are both worshipped (Rev. 5:13). How various beings are related to this throne is expressed by:

- prepositions (*enōpion*, ‘in front of,’ eleven times; *kyklothen*, ‘around,’ ‘encircling,’ two times)
- an adverb (*kyklō*, ‘in a circle,’ ‘all around,’ three times)
- prepositional phrases (*en mesō*, ‘in the middle of,’ ‘among,’ two times; *ana meson*, ‘in the center,’ ‘at the center,’ one time)

“In the topography of heaven, then, there would seem to be three concentric circles of beings around the throne: an outer circle of a myriad of angels who *encircled the throne* (Rev. 5:11); an intermediate circle of elders who *encircled* the throne (Rev. 5:6); and an inner circle of four living creatures *around the throne* (Rev. 4:6). In addition, two passages are relevant as we consider the precise position of the Lamb. First, Revelation 5:6 has him standing *in the middle of the throne*, which probably means *in close proximity to the throne* or *immediately adjacent to the throne* (as in Rev. 4:6). But Revelation 7:17, on the other hand, speaks of the Lamb *who is at the center of the throne*, reflecting the single use in Revelation of the prepositional phrase *ana meson*. If this verse points to his essential position, there are also hints that he is not stationary: *He went and took the scroll* (Rev. 5:7); *He will shepherd them and will lead them to springs of living water* (Rev. 7:17). Whereas other beings surround the throne in varying degrees of proximity, the risen Jesus as the Lamb not only shares the throne equally with the Lord God Almighty but also occupies its very center. To judge by frequency of usage, the two

focal points in the book of Revelation are *the throne* (forty-one times) and *the One who sits on the throne* (eleven times). But at that throne's center is the lamb, who is one with God the Father in his being and status."²

- I. **THE SHEPHERD SUPPLIES** (verse 1). "I shall lack nothing." The Shepherd's abundant provision is emphasized by the additional thought, *green pastures*.³ Jesus declares in John 10 that His sheep shall be saved, "and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (verse 9). The sheep find safety, liberty and sustenance. Every need is met by the Sovereign Shepherd. He supplies "abundantly" (John 10:10). The word is *perisson*, lit. to overflow, to have a surplus. The idea is to have more than is needed (comp. Romans 5:20). The Psalmist sings, "My cup overflows" (verse 5). "Jehovah is no niggard host, like the Pharisee (Luke 7:46); He provides for the joys as well as the necessities of life (John 2:1-11); His guests shall be of a cheerful countenance and a gladsome heart (104:15)."⁴ The sheep are the Shepherd's responsibility. There is no need that He will not supply, and He possesses infinite and perfect wisdom in such matters. He *knows* what the sheep need, and He will supply. Why could David say that? Because "the Lord is *my* shepherd." David was His. He called him by name (John 10:3). The sheep know the Shepherd, and they recognize His voice,⁵ and He calls them by name (John 10:3). "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me" (John 10:14). "My" shepherd, who knows "me" will supply my every *need* (comp. Philippians 4:19). But one of the great tragedies in our lives is blindness to true needs (Revelation 3:17). Instead, we too often stuff ourselves with the things of this world and our spiritual appetites are dulled. We shepherd ourselves into the wrong pastures – rather we stray like sheep seeking to fill our own needs – only to be disappointed. "Children of God, do you not fight against losing your own poor shepherdhood and bowing under Christ's glorious shepherdhood? Is it not fine that Jehovah will supply your necessities if it really becomes necessity within, and also true that you must condemn yourself for how you so easily avoid as a plague the great blessing of spiritual necessity? O God, make me to need Thee again, for then I shall meet thee again, and my resulting proclamation shall be, *I shall not want*."⁶ Remember, the Good Shepherd *will* seek and find straying sheep.

- II. **THE SHEPHERD RESTORES** (verse 3). "He restores my soul," *shôbēb*, signifies to bring back the soul that is as it were flown away, so that it comes to itself again, therefore to impart new life, . . . This He does to the soul, by causing it amidst the dryness and heat of temptation and trouble, to taste the very essence of life which refreshes and strengthens it."⁷ David knew the need for restoration (comp. Psalm 25:7, 11; Psalm 32, 51). David stumbled and knew the need for restoration (comp. Psalm 25:7, 11; Psalm 32, 51). David stumbled and fell more than once. He committed adultery and murder. But God restored him. Indeed, Isaiah declares, "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion" (30:18). "Think of the parable which Jesus told. The shepherd has a flock of one hundred sheep. One is lost. What does he do? Does he say: 'It has had all the provision I have made and ungratefully rebelled. Let it be?' On the contrary, he leaves the comfort of his home; he leaves his other sheep in the fold; he pursues his lost sheep *until he finds it* (Luke 15:4). Then he brings it home *joyfully*, not *grudgingly* (*wretched beast, ungrateful creature!*), but *lovingly* 'on his shoulders.' There is no burden too great for the good shepherd to bear. He will give his life for the sheep. Indeed, our Good Shepherd has done so (John 10:11, 17-18)."⁸ Peter is another example of restoration. His sin was grievous, and he wept bitterly afterwards (Luke 22:62). But Jesus sought him out (cf. Mark 16:7; John 21:15-22). Note Peter's words in his first epistle, "And the God of grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and

ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10). The word translated “restore” is *katartizō*, lit. to put in order, to mend as in setting a broken bone. It is the same word used by Paul in Galatians 6:1 of restoring a fallen brother. The Good Shepherd (John 10:13) is “concerned” (*melei moi*, to be concerned about someone, to care, same word in 1 Peter 5:7) with the welfare of the sheep, even when, or especially when, they fall. “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:18, 19).”

III. **THE SHEPHERD LEADER** (verse 3). “He leads me beside quiet waters . . . He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Notice that this is something the Shepherd *does for the sheep*, not merely something in which He instructs us. In John 10 Jesus declares, “When he puts forth all of his own, he goes before them” (verse 4). The NASB has correctly caught the force of the verb *ekballō*, “puts forth,” lit. to drive out. The word means to compel. “Left to themselves the sheep might not go in the right way, but the shepherd constrains them. He uses force if necessary to ensure that their best interests are served.”⁹ He directs “in paths of righteousness” (comp. Proverbs 4:11; 8:20; 12:28). The thought is that God directs in ways harmonious with His character. The sheep are not left to wander – and the direction and destination find their source in Him. Remember how the Apostle Paul urges the believer “to walk worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). Knowledge of this calling determines the basis for the worthy walk. Thus the great need for knowing the Word of God. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Shepherd does this “for His name’s sake.” “Since *name* is the equivalent of *character* or *reputation*, this beautiful little phrase means: He does all this because He has a reputation among His saints for faithful dealings with them, a reputation which must be cautiously upheld.”¹⁰ Calvin is quick to point out, “That, however, he may not ascribe any thing to his own worth or merit, David represents the goodness of God as the cause of so great liberality, declaring that God bestows all of these things upon him *for his own name’s sake*. And certainly his choosing us to be his sheep, and his performing towards us all the offices of a shepherd, is a blessing which proceeds entirely from his free and sovereign goodness.”¹¹

IV. **THE SHEPHERD PROTECTS** (verse 4). God will lead and direct us in paths of righteousness, which at times will not be paths of ease and tranquility. There is no promise that God will not lead us into hard times. The trials of life will come (comp. Matthew 7:24-27 – the storm came upon the foolish and the wise). “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” *tsalmáveth*, lit. valley of deepest darkness. Although this primarily has in view death as such (a Hebrew idiom), it also includes all of the dark and bitter experiences of life. “I will fear no evil for you are with me.” Think of the last days of the Apostle Paul. Writing to Timothy from a Roman prison, he says, “At my first defense no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.” What a terrible experience! In the face of certain death he finds himself abandoned – or does he? “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:16-18). He has promised, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we pray with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6). “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” The shepherd’s rod and staff serve to not only protect the sheep, but also to direct them. “God is both correcting by affliction and upholding by grace; and the two combined are comforting.”¹²

- V. **THE SHEPHERD CARES** (verse 5). God richly blesses His people. “He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” The thought is similar to Revelation 3:9; God will make public His favor. The word translated “table” is *Shulchan*, which refers to a large piece of leather (like a bedroll). Shepherds would carry supplementary pieces of choice vegetation to feed the sheep if forage was scarce or if some of the sheep were sick or injured and could not graze. “You anoint my head with oil.” In connection with this, A. G. Clarkes writes: “At the close of the day the shepherd stands at the door of the fold ‘rodding the sheep,’ i.e., controlling them with his rod, and not only counting them as they pass in, but closely examining the condition of each sheep. Using olive oil and cedar tar, he anoints wounds, scratches and bruises, and refreshes the worn and weary by making them drink out of a large, two-handled cup, brimming with water provided for the purpose.”¹³ The Shepherd has come so that His sheep might have life and might have it abundantly (John 10:10) even in times of trial and suffering. “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (Isaiah 40:11).
- VI. **THE SHEPHERD PERSEVERES** (verse 6). “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” The word translated “follow” is *radaph*, lit. pursue so as to overtake. The wicked are pursued by judgment (Psalm 35:6) and hunted by calamity (Psalm 140:11). It is as if the Good Shepherd had two sheepdogs, one named “Goodness” and the other named “Love,” and they will direct the sheep all the way home. It is because of the Shepherd that goodness and love are the possession of the sheep. His life, His death secured these blessings for the sheep, and because of His death, God will always pursue His children. He will always persevere with them. He will always supply, restore direction, protect and care for His sheep. He will never lose any of His sheep (John 10:28, 29). He will bring all of His sheep home. “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water” (Revelation 7:16-17).

CONCLUSION: C. H. Spurgeon remarked, “The position of this psalm is worthy of notice. It follows the twenty-second, which is peculiarly the Psalm of the Cross. There are no green pastures, no still waters on the other side of the twenty-second psalm. It is only after we read, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’, that we come to ‘the Lord is my Shepherd.’ We must by experience know the value of the blood-shedding, and see the sword awakened against the shepherd, before we shall be able truly to know the sweetness of the good Shepherd’s care.”¹⁴ It could also be pointed out that Psalm 24 declares the glory of the King of kings and Lord of lords, Psalm 22 the suffering Shepherd smitten for the sheep, Psalm 23 the good Shepherd caring for the sheep, Psalm 24 the glorious and sovereign Shepherd in His Kingdom with His sheep. He is MY shepherd, “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). He has promised to care for me, as an individual, in every way and at all times. “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20, 21).

ENDNOTES

¹H. R. Mackintosh, *Sermons* (T&T Clark, 1983), p. 131.

²M. J. Harris, *Navigating Tough Texts: A Guide to Problem Passages in The New Testament* (Lexham Press, 2020), p. 221.

³Note the idea of “rest” here. “When the shepherd makes the sheep to lie down, it is in a place where there are *grassy meadows* . . . so the first prospect held before the eyes of the faithful followers of the good Lord is that, when rest becomes imperative, He will supply it.” H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Baker, 1969), p. 211. F. Delitzsch points out that the resting place most likely was an oasis, i.e., a verdant spot in the wilderness with shade and water, cf. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament V* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 329.

⁴A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (rpt. Baker, 1982), p. 127.

⁵The word translated “hear” is *akouō* (used with the genitive). “It denotes that the sheep hear the shepherd’s voice with understanding and appreciation. Note the significance of *idia* [his own]. The shepherd does not call sheep in general. He calls his own sheep, and he has a call that they recognize.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1971), p. 502. Likewise, B. F. Westcott notes, “Each *sheep* has its own name. They are severally regarded not as simply units in a flock, but as having a peculiar character. In accordance with this conception the word *phōnei* [call] expresses personal address rather than general or authoritative invitation (*kalei*).” *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (rpt. Baker, 1980), p. 51.

⁶J. R. Beeke, *Jehovah Shepherding His Sheep: Sermons On the Twenty-Third Psalm* (Netherlands Reformed Book and Pub. Co., 1982), p. 119.

⁷Keil and Delitzsch, p. 330.

⁸Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Discovering God’s Will* (Banner of Truth, 1981), p. 119.

⁹L. Morris, p. 503.

¹⁰H. C. Leupold, p. 212.

¹¹*Calvin’s Commentaries: Psalm 1* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1963 reprint), p. 392.

¹²J. G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary On the Book of Psalms* (Klock & Klock, 1977), p. 183.

¹³A. G. Clark, *Analytical Studies In the Psalms* (John Ritchie Ltd., 1967), p. 76.

¹⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms I* (rpt. Baker, 1978), p. 398.